

Malachi 3:6-12 — How Can I Rob God?

March 11, 2018

It is great to have you this morning at CrossWinds. We lost an hour of sleep, but that is a good sign. Spring is coming. Before we begin this morning's study, I want to take a few minutes to let you know what is on the teaching schedule for this spring at CrossWinds. Next week, we finish the book of Malachi. Short books pass quickly. I hope you didn't blink. The following week is Palm Sunday, we will focus on the final days and hours of Christ's life and what happened on the cross. The next week is Easter. For Easter, we will have one service across the street at the Sami Center where we will celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Christ's resurrection changes everything.

The week between Palm Sunday and Easter we will host the Experience the Passion event at the Dickinson County Expo Center like last year. I encourage you to attend. Even more important than attending is bringing someone with you. This event is a great way to introduce our friends and neighbors to the good news of Jesus this Easter season.

After Easter, we will begin a short series called Discovering God's Will. If you have wrestled with trying to discern God's will about who to marry, what career to pursue or if you are wondering if God wants you to take a promotion; this study will help you sort through those kinds of choices.

After that, we will begin a study in the Gospel of Mark. This study will help us learn about the life of Christ. It will be exciting to walk in the footsteps of Jesus through the summer.

This morning, we are back in Malachi. Let's jump in.

The banner that flies over the entire book of Malachi is God's unchanging love for his ever-changing people. We saw this in the first five verses of the book. The good news is God's unchanging love for his people isn't just an Old Testament thing for ancient Israel, but it includes us today as his adopted children through Jesus.

No matter how our circumstances leave us feeling, no matter how messed up life becomes, we are confident that as God's children, we are deeply and passionately loved by God no matter what happens. If you doubt that God loves us, look at the cross. God the Father gave his own son to save us from sin. God has not forgotten about us. God loves us. That was true in Malachi's day, and it is true today.

While God's love does not change, the love of God's people for him had changed. The priests in Malachi's day didn't honor God in their sacrifices. They offered God their garbage instead of their best. When the priests taught about God, they didn't faithfully represent God to his people. It wasn't just the priests that had fallen away from God, but the people also dishonored God by divorcing their godly wives to marry younger pagan wives.

As we pick up our study this mornings study, we see the both sides of Malachi in our study. First, God will refresh us on the faithfulness of his love for us. Next, he will show us another way his people walk away from him.

God loves us. He won't leave us. No matter what we have done, we can return to him.

"For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my

statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?' Malachi 3:6–7 (ESV)

If you were God, wouldn't you be sick and tired of these people? This book is a laundry list of the infidelities of God's people against him. Wouldn't you be tempted to give up on them? Wouldn't you be tempted to throw in the towel? I would!

Here is the good news. We may be unfaithful to God but he is never unfaithful to us. No matter how far we have run from God, he still has his arms open wide. God says to his people that the only reason they have not been consumed is because he doesn't change. God says, "I have chosen to love you, and I won't let you go."

God's love for us doesn't stop, no matter what we have done to him. God is like a pit bull. He holds on to us and won't let go. No matter how unfaithful you have been to God this morning, he will not be unfaithful to you. He loves you. He will *never* let you go!

The unfaithfulness of God's people in Malachi's time wasn't just a one-generation problem. Infidelity to God characterized God's people from the very beginning. The same generation that God took out of Egypt, the generation that witnessed supernatural judgments on the land of Egypt, the same generation that God supernaturally provided manna every day, the same generation that God brought across the Red Sea on dry ground, the same generation that was given water from a rock twice, are the people that turned away from God 14 times. He didn't let them go into the Promised Land, but he didn't let go of them. God was faithful. He took their children into the Promised Land.

In the book of Judges, every time God sent a judge to save his people, a few years later they walked away from God. The entire book of Judges is a repeating cycle. It is God's people walking away from him. God sends a judge to rescue them. Next they walk away from him again. Do you see why the infidelities of God's people would have caused us to give up on them? Yet, God never let them go.

God says to you, "No matter how far away from me that you have strayed, I love you. I am waiting for you. Return with open arms. You may not be able to forgive yourself for what you have done but I can forgive you for what you have done. Return to me. I will return to you." That is the incredible love of God.

One of the best pictures of God's faithful love in the New Testament is the story of the prodigal son. In that story, the son asked for his inheritance while his father was living. He essentially told his father, "I wish you were dead. I just want your money." His father gave him his fortune. His son took the money and squandered it on wild living. When the money was gone and the son had nothing, he finally chose to humble himself and return to his father. When he came home, in the story, we see his dad didn't reject him but was thrilled to see him. We find that for years the father was constantly gazing at the horizon, waiting for his son's return. When he saw his son coming, this elderly father ran to him. He opened his arms and held him. He had a party for him. In spite of what the son had done to his father, his father still loved him and was always hoping and waiting for his return.

That is a picture of how God feels about you this morning. He loves you. No matter how far you have strayed from him, he is waiting for you to come home. He wants to wrap his arms around you and hold you tight. He wants to celebrate your return. "Return to me, and I will return to you." We are thankful to have a God whose love doesn't change.

As Malachi continues, we move from the faithfulness of God to another way God's people are unfaithful to him. These people were unfaithful to God in their budget.

Not giving to God is robbing God.

Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, "How have we robbed you?" In your tithes and contributions. Malachi 3:8 (ESV)

God says, "Let's talk about your budget. Let's look at your spending, your saving and your giving." When God examined their giving column, he was not happy.

They were robbing God. That is not good. If you are going to rip anybody off, it better not be God. He has a way of dealing with stealing that is not good, especially when it is from Him.

How were these folks robbing God? They were robbing him by not giving their tithes and contributions. Let me explain.

- A tithe simply means a tenth. People were to give 10 percent of their income to God.
- A contribution is also called an offering. Contributions and offerings are special gifts for special needs that are above and beyond a tithe.

Let me tell you a little more about the tithe.

Under the old Mosaic covenant, God's people paid multiple tithes. Some people point out that tithes in the law of Moses were simply their taxes. That isn't completely true. There were other taxes that we will not talk about this morning that were intended to support the king and country besides the tithes. The tithes were primarily intended as an act of worship and to support the needs of worship.

In the Mosaic covenant, there were three tithes given.

The first tithe they were to bring was 10 percent of all their produce and livestock. It was also to be what was first and best from their crop, not what was last and worst. This 10 percent giving was not just an act of worship to God but it also provided the needs of those in full-time ministry — the Levites. The Levites then gave a tithe of the money they received to the priests to support them.

(Numbers 18:21-24, 25-32). When a worshiper brought his tithe to the Lord, he could use part of that to enjoy a special meal with his family and the Levites (Deut 12:6-7; 17-19). If people had heavy produce that they didn't want to carry all the way to the temple, they could sell it and convert it to cash. They had to add 20 percent to it if they converted their tithe to cash (Lev. 27:31).

In addition to this first tithe, they gave a second tithe on special feast days. Every third year this second tithe was held within the hometowns of Israel and used as a benevolent fund to support the immigrants, fatherless children and widows (Deut. 14:28-29).

While tithing means 10 percent, under the laws of Moses, people gave multiple tithes so they gave more than 10 percent. Some scholars estimate God's

people gave up to 27 percent of their income in worship to the Lord in the Old Testament.

Remember that tithing was not a form of taxing. It was a form of worshipping. Tithing predates Moses. Abraham gave a tithe of the spoil he obtained from conquering an army to Melchizedek, an ancient priest of God. Abraham gave his tithe as an act of worship, not a form of taxes.

Some churches never pass the offering plate in the service. They have offering boxes on the back wall because they don't want to interrupt worship with money. While there is nothing wrong with having offering boxes on the back wall, I prefer to pass the plate in the service. The reason I prefer to pass the plate is because it reminds us that giving a portion of our money to God is part of worship of God. Financial giving is part of our worship.

At the time of Malachi, people were not giving their tithes. The priests were skinny. They were leaving their posts to go home and plant gardens to grow food for their families. God was not happy because not only were they not worshipping him, they were hurting his priests. God used some strong language. He said when they neglected their tithes and offerings, they were actually robbing him.

Robbing God is a different way to think about withholding giving. When we give to God, we typically think we are giving our money to God. God said, "That is backward. You are not giving your money to me. I am blessing you by allowing you to keep most of my money in your hands."

For example, let's say you work at Pure Fishing. Who gave you the job? God. Who gave you the gifts and wisdom to do your job? God. All of the money

you make is God's money. Keeping all of his money and not giving a portion of it as an act of worship is stealing from God.

Let's say you are a farmer. Whose land do you farm? God's. Who gave you the land? God. Who gave you the seed? God did. Who gave you the rain and the sun? God did. It is all his. God says, "Keep 90 percent of the crop. Honor me with 10 percent." To keep God's portion is to rob God.

When we get our paycheck, we dare not say, "I don't want to give God 10 percent of my money." We need to thank God he lets us keep a large portion of his money.

God cursed his people when they wouldn't give.

You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.
Malachi 3:9 (ESV)

The result of God's people not giving their tithes and contributions to God was they were cursed by God. When God curses you, that sounds like a serious issue. Instead of life going well, it will go poorly.

We know one of the reasons God's people didn't give their tithes and gifts to God is because they were experiencing financial hardship. They felt they couldn't afford to give because times were tough. They figured they would give later when they had excess cash. God says it doesn't work that way. "It is because you are not giving to me that you don't have enough money. I won't bless you with more money when you are not faithful with the little bit of money I already gave you." They told God to give them more so they would be faithful. God said he wouldn't give them more because they were not faithful.

God promised throughout the Old Testament that when his people didn't honor him, they wouldn't experience blessing from him. Look what the prophet Haggai said to these people about building the temple in a slightly earlier part of their history.

You have sown much, and harvested little. You eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm. And he who earns wages does so to put them into a bag with holes. "Thus says the Lord of hosts: Consider your ways. Haggai 1:6–7 (ESV)

I love the way he said, "Consider your ways." Think about this. Why do you think you can never get ahead in life? When you don't give to God, notice what happens to your money. You don't find yourself keeping more money. You find yourself not having enough. It goes to doctor bills. It goes to insurance deductibles. It goes to unexpected repairs. By not giving to God, his people don't end up keeping more money. When they don't have God's favor, they end up losing money because it ends up getting spent on something else.

Look what the book of Leviticus tells us about why God's people in Old Testament times would experience financial distress.

But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever that consume the eyes and make the heart ache. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down before your enemies. Those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you. Leviticus 26:14–17 (ESV)

This is exactly what happened to God's people in Malachi's day. Instead of following God's command to honor God with their money, they were doing their own thing. As a result, they had terrible harvests. As a result, their enemies

harassed them. Persia ruled over them. God doesn't change. Their sin in the area of finances is what part of what led to their suffering.

This gives us a window into our big idea for this morning. When we don't honor God with our finances, we are not just robbing God. We are robbing ourselves.

God promises to bless those who give.

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts. Malachi 3:10-11 (ESV)

God said to bring the full tithe into the storehouse. The storehouse was essentially a huge walk-in pantry in the temple. "Fill it up so the Levites actually get paid for their work. Make sure there is money in the local benevolent fund for the poor, the single mothers and orphans." God said, "Test me in this."

Normally God doesn't tell us to test him but in this case he told his people to test him. He said, "You have stories of how God worked miraculously in the lives of your forefathers. Now, you can experience God working miraculously in your lives. Simply give the tithes and offerings that I command for my house, and I will bless you. I am not asking for extraordinary giving, just do the ordinary giving."

God said he would literally open the windows of heaven and pour down blessings on them until they had more than enough and there was no more scarcity in the land. When Malachi said this, he was reaching back into the time of Noah's flood when God opened the floodgates of heaven and it rained for 40 days and 40 nights. That is the kind of blessing God wanted to pour on them.

Many Bible scholars believe a large part of this could literally have been like Noah's flood. Remember, they were in a drought. God said, "If you will just put me first in your financial world, I will take care of you in your world. I will not just take care of you but I will give you more than you need."

He also promised to rebuke the devourer. This is most likely the locust. Locusts were notorious for invading fields and stripping the leaves and produce bare. God promised to supernaturally protect their fields from locusts and sustain their crops.

Remember, they were in a time of famine. They barely had enough of their own food. That was why they were neglecting their giving to God. God said, "The reason you don't have enough is because you put me last in your budget, not first in your budget. Give to me first and I will take care of protecting your crop. I will take care of making sure you have enough rain for an abundant harvest." When God's people give to him, he promises to provide for them.

Now before we go much further, I want to guard against a common misunderstanding of this verse. These verses in Malachi are favorite verses for health-wealth-and-prosperity preachers. They say, if you want to get rich, all you need to do is give to God. If you sow a \$10 seed of faith in the offering plate, God will send you a \$100. If you put a \$100 in the offering plate, God will send you a \$1,000. They go right here to make this point.

They view God as a cosmic piñata. We just need to whack God a few times with the offering plate and he will turn into a cosmic ATM.

That is the wrong way to think about this passage. That is worshipping God for greed, not worshipping God out of gratitude. This passage is not a guarantee to all farmers that if they put enough in the offering plate they will never face drought or bugs in their corn. This was a one-time promise to these people. It specifically applied to the people of Israel living in the Promised Land under the Mosaic law. While this passage is a one-time promise, it contains an all-time principle. The all-time principle is God's people are to give to worship God from their wealth. Just as the Israelites fell out of God's favor when they chose to not worship God with their wealth, so will we. When we choose to worship God with our wealth, we enjoy the favor of God. God honors those who honor him. What we put or don't put in the offering plate matters. It will have a direct impact on our lives. This is not because God needs our money. The reason is because God wants our hearts. Where our money goes, our hearts go.

When we don't honor God with our finances, we are not just robbing God. We are robbing ourselves.

Let's jump outside of this passage and see what else the Bible says about giving.

What else does the Bible tell us about giving?

- 1. God is more concerned about the size of the sacrifice than the size of the gift.**

Jesus told us the story of the widow's mite. Let's read it.

And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all

contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.” Mark 12:41–44 (ESV)

Some of us don't have a lot to give. We wonder if it is even worth putting our little offering in the plate. Jesus is watching when we give. He sees the size of the sacrifice we make for him. That is what counts. Some people who are very rich may put in a large gift but the sacrifice is nothing. Other people struggle to put in smaller amounts but God is honored by their gifts. The size of their sacrifice matters more than the size of the gift.

2. God blesses givers based on the generosity of their giving.

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 2 Corinthians 9:6 (ESV)

Paul said giving is like farming. If you want a big crop, you sow a lot of fields. You put a lot of money in the ground. If you want a small crop with a small harvest, you sow a little bit of money in the ground. In this passage Paul told us that to some degree we decide how much we want God to delight in our lives based on the generosity of our lives.

I want to remind you that God's hand of favor on our lives may not be financial. Some of the greatest gifts in our lives are not bought or sold.

3. Give proportionate to our income.

For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. 2 Corinthians 8:12 (ESV)

Second Corinthians 8 and 9 have many principles for giving. That our giving should be proportional to our income is one of those principles. In the Old Testament, that proportional giving was typically 10 percent. The New Testament doesn't specify a specific amount for our giving but it should be proportional to

what we make. Those who have more, should give more. Those who have less, should give less.

4. We are to give voluntarily and joyfully.

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7 (ESV)

Whatever we put in the offering plate should be a gift we give because we want to give it, not because we are under compulsion that we have to give it. Whenever we write a check to God, we must put it in the offering plate joyfully, cheerfully and thankfully. It is an act of worship.

5. We give with confidence that God will take care of our needs.

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:8 (ESV)

Many times, when we struggle to give, it is because we are afraid we will need the money and won't have the money. Many of us feel too financially strapped to give. We think we have too much debt to pay off before we can give. Paul said that isn't the way it works. When give to God, we give in faith that the money we need to survive and do good works will be provided by God so we can make it through.

6. Everyone should give to God.

On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. 1 Corinthians 16:2 (ESV)

Some of us this morning are in junior high school and you have a paper route. Give to God from your paper route. Some of us are in high school, and you are saving for college. Give to God first and save the rest for college. Remember,

God is the giver of your paycheck. To not give to him is to rob him. To not give is to be cursed instead of blessed. When we give, we give in faith that God will provide for our needs when we put him first. Start giving when you are young so you have learned this practice for when you are old. Each of us should be givers no matter how young we are, no matter how old we are. God's people give to him first and trust him to take care of their needs.

If you are paid each week, this verse tells us to give each week. As an act of worship make sure the first check we write off our paychecks is our gift to God. If we think we can't afford to give, according to Malachi we can't afford not to give.

7. If we don't give, we are not just robbing God, we are robbing ourselves.

...give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you. Luke 6:38 (ESV)

God promises to take care of us when we honor him with our wealth. He always promises to give more back to us than we every gave to him. That may not be financially but it is a promise he will keep. I have yet to meet someone that couldn't survive because they put too much in the offering plate. Trust God on this. When we honor him with our wealth, he will take care of us. We can't out-give God.

8. Giving opens the door to accomplishing greater things for God.

If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? Luke 16:11 (ESV)

How many of us desire to do great things for God and for his kingdom? If you don't, I hope that changes and you desire to do great things for God with your life. Billy Graham is dead. God is looking for his replacement. I hope it is one of us. Ask God in prayer that he would do great things for his kingdom through your life. Notice I didn't say that we should pray to do great things for our glory. I said we should pray to do great things for God's glory.

God says, "If I can't trust us to rightly handle the little bit of money I put in your pocket by giving a portion back of it back in worship to me, how can I trust you to do things for my kingdom, things that are much greater than a little bit of money?" Faithfulness to God in the little area of money is essential to God opening doors of opportunities for us to do much greater things for God and his kingdom.

9. Giving writes our autobiography.

No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. Matthew 6:24 (ESV)

Each of us can only serve one master. Either we are living for greed or we are living for God. There is no middle ground. Our giving reveals what we really love. What we love is seen in how we spend. You can say you love your family but if someone looks at your checkbook and sees a lot more money spent on your hobbies than your wife and kids, it reveals the truth. If our budgets reveal faithful giving to the Lord, it tells about our relationship with the Lord. Your giving writes your autobiography.

10. Faith without giving is dead.

The book of James says faith without works is dead. James says you can't claim to love Jesus on the inside without having a changed life on the outside. Malachi was like James. He said if we truly love God, it will show up in our finances. If our faith doesn't show up in our giving, there is an issue with our faith. Faith without giving is dead faith. It is always out of the overflow of the heart that the wallet spends.

11. Giving changes me.

God never says to get your heart right and then start giving. He says to start giving and it will help you get your heart right with him. Imagine a couple is struggling in marriage. Should they wait until they have all their marriage issues solved before they go on a date? No! They should start loving each other, serving one another and dating one another. That will change their hearts toward one another. When we start giving to God, it will change our hearts toward God.

12. You will be tested to rob God.

Remember what happened in the days of Malachi. They were in an economic downturn. The first thing they did when hard financial times hit was cut God out of their budgets. God was testing them to see what they would do when they ran short of money. They failed the test.

God will test us. We will experience tough financial times. God is using those tough financial times to reveal the truth of our hearts and love for him. God wants to see if we will drop him from our giving or if we will trust him with our giving.

I can tell you from personal experience that God takes care of those who give to him when they have to trust him. Let us be different than the people in Malachi's day. Let's pass the test. Let's be people who give to God when we need to give by faith and trust God to provide for our needs.

Should Christians Tithe?

The earlier part of our study centered around why, when and how to give to God. Now we need to wrestle with the important question of, "How much should we give?" As we saw in the beginning, tithing was an expression of thankfulness to God seen in the life of Abraham even before the law of Moses was established. Tithing was not just a part of the old covenant that is now obsolete. It predates the old covenant.

In the Mosaic law, God's people gave multiple tithes. Most of those tithes were considered worship, but some of them could be considered the operation of their government.

In the New Testament, it doesn't give us a specific percentage to give to God. In 2 Corinthians 8-9 we are told our giving should be cheerful, sacrificial, regular, proportional and that everyone should give in worship to God.

The question is, should we give 10 percent? Should we give more? Should we give less? The practice of many Christians is to give a tithe, that is 10 percent, of their income to God. Statistically 73 percent of Christians give less than a tithe.

How much should we give? Here are my thoughts"

1. Tithing is never eliminated in the New Testament. Our giving is to be proportional but the New Testament doesn't tell us what that percentage should be. Our giving should be described as generous, sacrificial, proportionate and cheerful. To me, tithing is a great place to start our giving. Think of tithing like training wheels for givers.
2. Tithing should be the floor of our giving, not the ceiling of our giving. It is the right place to start but it shouldn't be considered the right place to stop. Remember God promises to meet the needs of the giver and to bless the giver.

How should I respond?

1. **What if I am not giving at all?** Some of you may be 10 years old. Others of you may be 50 years old and you don't give. The first way for you to respond to this message is to ask God to forgive you for not honoring him with your wealth. Maybe you don't give intentionally. Maybe the reason you haven't given in the past is simply you were ignorant to the importance of giving our wealth in worship. I don't know. Either way, begin by asking God for forgiveness. The second thing is to repent. That means to change. Make a commitment to start giving a tithe this week. If that isn't sacrificial for you, commit to give what is sacrificial for you so it is genuine worship. Make your giving check the first check you write after the paycheck as a way of honoring God and giving him what is first.
2. **What if I am tipping God, not sacrificially tithing to God?** Tipping means you give God something but it is not generous, not sacrificial and doesn't

involve faith and trust. God is not a waiter at a restaurant. We give to him more sacrificially than someone who fills our cups of coffee. If that is you, and each week you give God a tip for his services, know God is not honored. This week confess your greed and lack of worship. This week ask God what percentage he is calling you to give of your income in worship to him. Begin that adventure of faith where you give to him and trust him to meet your needs.

3. **What if I am already tithing or giving beyond the tithe?** Some of you are mature givers who give beyond a tithe and over the years you have even ratcheted up your giving so you give beyond a tithe. If that is you, your homework is to go home and thank God for faithfully providing for your needs. Hasn't he proven true? Hasn't he always met your needs? Hasn't he given to you in many ways above and beyond anything you gave to him? Go home this week thanking him for proving faithful when it came to finances.



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